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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether the images of "standard" or "acceptable" thinness that women suffering from eating disorders strive to achieve come primarily from advertising. A questionnaire was administered to 19 college women in counseling for anorexia, a control group of 29 college women, and to 30 high school women. The questionnaire was designed to elicit attitudes on physical attractiveness, awareness of an "ideal" body shape, and media influence in promoting that ideal body shape. An experiment on model selection using print advertisement photographs of women was conducted at the end of the questionnaire, in which subjects rated the success of the models in the photographs. Significant findings fell into expected patterns: the anorexic subjects were less happy with their shapes and more influenced by an "ideal body shape." Surprisingly, though, they did not judge others by body shape standards as much as was expected. There was strong agreement that an "ideal body shape" exists in American society to which women are expected to conform. The anorexics were found to be significantly more media conscious and more influenced by the media on body images than the other two groups. The influence of television programs and movies was stronger for high school students than for the college control or anorexic groups. (The questionnaire and other materials used in the study are appended). (HTH)

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Committee on the Status of Women

MEDIA IMAGES AND IDEAL BODY SHAPES:
A PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN
WITH EMPHASIS ON ANOREXICS

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Anorexia nervosa, a psychological illness exhibited in a relentless pursuit of excessive thinness and achieved through elective starvation, expresses perhaps a true psychological perspective on women.

The author of the most noted book on this phenomenon, The Obsession, The Tyranny of Slenderness, claims "when we scratch the surface of this obsession with weight and food we enter the hidden emotional life of women. This obsession might well be considered one of the most serious forms of suffering affecting women in America today." (6:prologue, 19)

Another feminist, quoted in The Obsession, says it is "a heavy toll we pay for our national mania for thinness--millions of women whose distorted perceptions of their own bodies give them little peace and rest." (6:35)

Practicing psychologists, medical doctors and feminists alike decry the alarming trend to both self-starvation and bingeing/purging, the two most common eating disorders.* Garner and Garfinkel, Canadian psychiatrists who have surveyed thousands of women about eating behavior and who are considered leading anorexia nervosa researchers, conservatively estimate that 12 percent of females have a serious (constant worry about size and use of drastic weight control methods) eating disorder. (15:45) An Indianapolis psychologist estimates that one in every 60 midwestern coeds suffers from the problem. (7) Yale social psychologist Judith Rodin, credited with breakthroughs in obesity study and with founding the new

* An eating disorder is defined as a distorted pattern of thinking about and behaving around food.

fields of behavioral medicine and health psychology, puts the number from 35 to 60 percent. (11:43). Two academicians who studied food behavior among college women found not only a dramatic prevalence of anorexic-like behaviors among the supposedly non-anorexic, normally-functioning coed group, but they encountered dieting "so widespread it was impossible to measure." (15:42)

What has been dubbed "the Karen Carpenter disease" and "the illness of the decade" is not a concoction of the 1980s. The term was coined by Gull in 1874, devised to reflect the presence of psychological as well as physiological components to the malady. (12:10)

The disease's etiology is confusing, but is generally considered to be complex and multidimensional. (8) Garner and Garfinkel believe the currently idealized body form for women -- a bony thinness -- plus pressures to achieve, to be successful and to be slender play significant factors in creating an anorexic condition. (8:107,104) Striving to please others and to validate self-worth from external sources by controlling appearance are other factors. (2:76) Thinness, for anorexics, is associated with self-control and success. (8:106)

While the phenomenon is not new, there has been a phenomenal increase in its actual prevalence over the past decade and in its appearance in the press. Magazines ranging from Time and Ms. to Signs and Journal of Woman in Culture and Society feature articles; The New York Times and New York Review of Books have devoted space to this mysterious problem; a slew of books from Cherry Boone's Starving for Attention to Fat Is A Feminist Issue and The Golden Cage appear on the reading lists of the three national associations founded to fight and/or educate regarding anorexia and related eating disorders. (13)

Most writers decry the fact that anorexia nervosa is solely a woman's disease and most ultimately link it to the idealized American body shape of extreme thinness.

This epidemic in dietary restraint and weight loss is, according to Garner and Garfinkel, an "exaggeration of a prominent contemporary value endemic to women in our culture." (9)

Another writer on anorexia says "Everything around us tells us that thinness is not only desirable but crucial to social, sexual, even professional success. Constant policing of our food intake--dieting--therefore seems essential." (15:45)

Social psychologist Rodin, in a Psychology Today article ironically placed back-to-back with a piece on the physical attractiveness syndrome, says:

By virtue of being a woman in this day, you feel too fat, even if you are five pounds underweight. The current body ideal is ridiculously slim, and almost all women aspire to it. It's unfortunate, because women are genetically programmed to be fatter than men, to lay down more fat cells and to store more food. When you put that genetic program in the context of the pressure on women to be thin, it's not surprising that there is so much erratic eating behavior among women today. (11:43)

She adds, "Bulimia (bingeing/purging) reflects a pathology in society. Bulimic women seem to have carried the typical female reaction to a pathological extreme." (11:43)

Dieting in America is not only big business, it is big numbers. In 1977, eight million people were enrolled in 12,000 weekly Weight Watcher classes; another 45,000 participated in 1,400 Diet Workshop groups; 1,400 groups of Overeaters Anonymous met. There have been 25 reprints of Reduce with the Low Calorie Diet since 1953, three million copies of Dr. Atkin's

Diet Revolution, five million of Doctor's Quick Weight Loss Diet and 500 million purse-size copies of The Cheater's Diet. (6:35-36)

Some 20 million Americans are on a serious diet at any moment; a mass that pumps approximately \$10 billion yearly into the diet industry in an attempt to lose themselves. (6:37)

Indeed, "in this era, when inflation has assumed alarming proportions and the threat of nuclear war has become a serious danger, when violent crime is on the increase and unemployment a persistent social fact, 500 people are asked by the pollsters what they fear most in the world and 190 of them answer that their greatest fear is 'getting fat.'" (6:37)

If we accept the statistical evidence of the pervasiveness of dieting and the fact there seems to be a culturally-accepted, albeit dictated, ideal body shape, then the question at hand is simple:

Who or what is creating or reinforcing this image
that so many are striving even killing themselves,
to achieve?

While much research has been done on anorexia nervosa and eating disorders, and while many have referred to the socio-cultural aspects of body slimness, no one appears to have attempted to empirically link the problem to the mass media.

Garner and Garfinkel do say the "potential impact of the media in establishing identificatory role models cannot be overemphasized." (9:652) Cash, Cash and Butters implicate the media in their research on physical attractiveness "by the fact that the mass media constantly expose us to the upper extreme of the normal distribution of physical attractiveness." (4:352) Many of the feminists concur. (16)

One aspect of the media in particular seems suspect as a carrier for

this disease: advertising, the communications arm devoted specifically to persuasion and sales.

THE HYPOTHESIS

The guiding belief behind this study is:

The unanimously-thin body image prompted by the omnipresent advertising industry has had a major impact on women's perceptions of an "ideal body shape" and on their eating behaviors, particularly for those admittedly suffering from anorexia nervosa.

The actual hypothesis for this study is:

Young women subjects will acknowledge existence of a nationally - "mandated" thin ideal body shape for women and will be affected by it in their perceptions of themselves and those around them; the media will be cited as the information source/agent that transmits this image (and contributes to the thin phenomenon), especially advertising; and, given the choice of body shapes (extremely thin or "anorexic-like," "average," or "heavy") in a photo experiment, subjects will rate thin models as more successful and will select thin models more often for various occupations and advertising situations. Specific to this study/experiment, anorexic subjects will exhibit a more pronounced reaction to the thin=success phenomenon.

This paper does not attempt to say advertising "causes" anorexia Nervosa. It is an attempt to link the pervasive and incredibly thin images spawned by the advertising industry to that image some young women are dying to achieve and to which others may spend years of personal unrest attempting to fulfill. This is an attempt to determine if subjects believe that the image they see as being "standard" and "acceptable" comes compliments primarily of the advertising industry.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Garner and Garfinkel provide a particularly good discussion of the socio-cultural factors affecting eating disorders through a shema showing predisposing, precipitating and perpetuating factors. Advertising could be seen to play critical roles in all three. (See Figure 1.)

Among the predisposing factors, it would seem (to this researcher) that advertising might be a significant component of the socio-cultural faction; among the "dieting and weight loss" faction of the precipitators, advertising again could play both causative and reinforcing roles, as well as being a major informant of diets and diet foods; among perpetuating fac-

PREDISPOSING
FACTORS

PRECIPITATING
FACTORS

PERPETUATING
FACTORS

Individual

Familial

Socio-cultural

Stressors

Dieting and weight loss

Environmental and
cognitive reinforcement
contingencies

Starvation effects

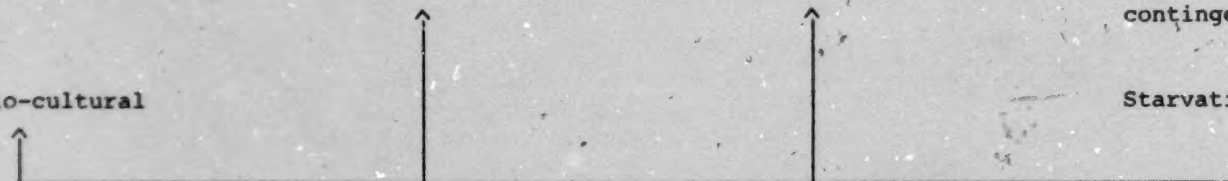


Figure 1. Garner and Garfinkel's schema showing multidimensional nature of anorexia nervosa. "Socio-cultural Factors in the Development of Anorexia Nervosa," Psychological Medicine, 1980, p. 654.

FIGURE 1.

tors, advertising could be considered a key component in the "reinforcement" contingency.

In the article in which this schema appears, Garner and Garfinkel state that the onset of anorexia nervosa "may be triggered by an apparently innocuous (emphasis added) event or comment leading to the 'fixed idea' that weight loss will ameliorate feelings of ineffectiveness or inadequacy." (9:654) Could not the 1,500 advertisements to which most Americans are exposed daily serve as the apparently innocuous event that "fixes the idea" that thin is the only way to be?

Indeed, Cash, Cash and Butters said, after upholding their hypothesis that subjects would report lower self-ratings for physical attractiveness after exposure to highly-attractive, same-sex stimuli,

Results suggest that thumbing through a popular magazine filled with beautiful models may have little immediate effect on self-image of most women. Still, one clearly cannot rule out the potential effect of long-term media exposure to cultural standards of beauty. (4:355)

Garner and Garfinkel found that anorexia nervosa and excessive dieting concerns were overrepresented in dance and modelling students studied along with control groups. These data suggested to the duo that cultural pressures to be slim and achievement expectations are risk factors in the development of the self-starving disease. (9:647)

Similarly, Ohio State researchers Cusin and Svendsen studied three groups of college coeds and found that nine percent of the regular coeds, 16 percent of the sorority members and 23 percent of the dance majors showed anorexia nervosa symptoms -- figures that translate to 45 percent of regular coeds, 54 percent of sorority women and 65 percent of the dancers answering "often," "very often," or "always" to "being preoccupied with a desire to

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be thinner." (15:42)

Another Garner and Garfinkel study documented the societal shift to a thinner ideal shape. The pair reported a significant trend over 20 years toward thinner Playboy magazine centerfolds and Miss America beauty pageant contestants. (10)

While centerfold weights did not actually decline because of an increase in height, the percent of average weight for age and height was found to decrease significantly along with bust and hip sizes. (10:485)

Similarly, Miss America pageant contestants showed an average weight reduction of .28 pounds per year, with the percent of average falling from 91 percent in 1959 to 83.5 percent in 1978. Pageant winners, they noted, were invariably thinner than the average contestant. (10:489)

Garner and Garfinkel saw these dual declines as a "gradual but definite evolution in the cultural ideal body shape over the past 20 years, particularly the last 10 years" toward a more "tubular" body. (10:489)

They also discovered that the number of diet articles in popular magazines (467 in six magazines over 20 years) increased from a mean of 17.1 for the first decade to a mean of 30 for the second. This, they said, substantiates an emphasis on weight reduction in pursuit of fashion's ideal figure. (10:489)

THE METHOD

A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and experiment was administered to a group of college coeds voluntarily in psychological counseling for eating disorders and to a control group of college coeds, all at Indiana University.

Psychologists at the university Student Health Service agreed to administer the instrument to their anorexic patients, some during small group meetings and some after individual counseling. Control groups were created

using students from an introductory university psychology course that requires participation in self-selected experiments.

Both groups received the same questionnaire and experiment.

Since the risk age of onset is bimodal at 14 and 18 years, typical high school ages, the questionnaire was also administered to a group of high school women. It was thought that this group from a small (pop. 5,500) Hoosier town might provide an interesting comparative unit against the average college coed control group and the collegiate anorexic group.

The original goal was to have 30 members in each group. Final N's were 30 for the high school group, 29 for the IU control group and 19 for the IU anorexic group.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit attitudes on four dimensions:

1. physical attractiveness;
2. existence of an "ideal body shape" and awareness of social agents contributing to the subjects' knowledge of it;
3. media influence in promoting an "ideal body shape" image;
4. sociocultural statements on weight and body shapes.

Demographic data, including self-analysis of eating behaviors, was also requested.

Physical attractiveness questions, rankings and scales reflect the work of Tesser and Brodie (1:166), Miller and Rivenbark (1:166) and Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1:169). They were included to determine agreement with Dion's "what is beautiful is good" thesis within the physical attractiveness stereotype that physically attractive persons possess more socially desirable characteristics and accrue more happiness and success.

"Ideal body shape" scales and questions reflect findings by Garner and Garfinkel (10:489) and feminist writers that pervasive and predominantly thin images have created an "ideal" shape and that it is increasingly tubular and childlike.

Seven pairs (one positive and one negative) of attitudinal statements were included. They represent key themes or trends reiterated in the research literature on anorexia and the feminist-oriented writings on weight. One question specifically geared to anorexics -- "Being able to control one's body size is an important sign of personal power" -- was also included.

An experiment on model selection using print advertisement photographs of women was conducted at the end of the questionnaire. Fifteen photos were mounted on two large posterboards and were shown to the subjects, who were then asked to rate each model on "successfulness" and to select models for various occupations and to select others to appear in various advertising commercials or situations.

Nine full-length body illustrations and six face-only photographs were selected (17). Each photo was cropped to eliminate advertising wording and background. Full face photos represented a range of ages and "types" of females including (1) an average, middle-aged female; (2) a silver-haired yet attractive female; (3) a "classic American beauty"; (4) a heavier in weight yet attractive female; (5) a young, fresh-faced female, and, (6) a younger, modern, bordering on "new Wave"-ish female.

The full-length photos were divided among three body shapes (three photos each): extremely thin to represent anorexic-like body shape; "normal" to show a size 10-12-14 type figure; and, decidedly full-figured and heavier. Both casual and dressy outfits were included. All photos were full color. Same-size background mats were used during mounting to offset difference in photo size and to help control for photo dominance during viewing. (See Appendix 2 for photos of models.)

The nine occupations represented predominantly male (bank officer and computer programmer), predominantly female (nurse and fashion model) and neu-

tral (secondary schoolteacher and social worker) jobs, according to the U.S. Department of Labor statistics broken by sex for white collar positions. (Blue collar and service positions seemed overly traditional (male factory supervisor, female domestics and hairdressers) and were excluded from the study.)

Three additional "occupations" -- those of "friend," "next-door neighbor," and "successful person" -- were included to see if subjects would select a highly-attractive person for a friend, as suggested in the literature, an "average" person for the less-intimidating role of next-door neighbor and a thin, beautiful person as a successful type.

The occupation of model, not listed by the labor department, was included both as a predominantly female job and to serve as a cross-check to the success rating of models. The highest-scoring model in that section should also receive the occupational role vote.

Advertisement scenarios were devised along similar lines, using two that would traditionally feature male models or spokespersons (home computers and new car), two with typically female spokespersons (kitchen cleanser and jeans) and two "neutral" products (coffee and aspirin).

The original questionnaire was pretested with selected subjects representative of eventual subject types. A few wording modifications were made from these pretests.

The actual questionnaire/experiment required 15 to 30 minutes of the subjects' time. During administration, subjects were told to use their own definitions of "success" and other qualitative judgmental adjectives used in the scales or ratings. Few instructions were necessary and the subjects were told only that the research project was on physical attractiveness

and body shapes. The anorexic angle was not mentioned. (Explanatory discussions were held after administration, both to share informative and because of the high interest exhibited toward the questionnaire.)

Questionnaires were anonymously completed and were put by the subjects into a large manila envelope at the test site to ensure anonymity.

The completed surveys were keypunched and computer analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer programs of frequencies, chi square via crosstabs, oneway analysis of variance (ONEWAY) and multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA). Analysis of MANOVA findings was made using Wilks lambda. (See MANOVA results in Appendix 3)

FINDINGS

Significant findings fell into expected patterns: the anorexics were less happy with their shapes and more influenced by an "ideal body shape." Surprisingly, though, they did not judge others by body shape standards as much as expected. The key findings include:

Images of An Ideal Body Shape

- There was strong agreement that there does exist an "ideal body shape" in American society to which women are expected to conform." Of the 78 total responses, 82% agreed to such an image; only 13 persons disagreed.

- Dieting was a prevalent pasttime, with 61% admitting to having been on a diet in the past month.

- The overall "ideal woman" would be 5'5" to 5'7", weighing between 117 and 122, with medium bone structure, blue eyes, brown hair, and 35-25-34 measurements that would fit into a size 7½. Surprisingly, the anorexics' "ideal" sizings did not drastically differ from the other two groups'.

- The anorexics thought the ideal body shape was a "hinner, straighter figure than did the other two, specifically differing on ratings for "pubescent" ($p=.019$), "fragile" ($p=.009$), "unisex" ($p=.058$) and "boyish" ($p=.0008$). Both anorexics and the collegiate controls thought "thin" was imperative to the ideal body shape ($p=.00005$), with averages of 6.7 and 6.5 on a 7-point scale, compared to the high schooler's 5.5. (Manova with Wilks, $p < .05$)

- While none of the three groups were happy with their bodies (the collegians and high schoolers tended to average midway on a 7-point scale), the anorexics were significantly less happy, being least likely to believe their bodies conform to the ideal ($p=.005$), being less content with their physical attractiveness ($p=.006$) and being much more influenced by the "ideal body shape" ($p=.002$). (Manova with Wilks.)

- The collegians were more "comfortable" ($p=.009$) with their bodies than either of the other two groups, which had similar scores (Q ="I have never really felt comfortable about my body shape," 1-7 scale, with 7 agree strongly. Collegians=3.3, anorexics=4.9, high schoolers=4.6.)

- The anorexics were much more negative than the other two groups about the impact of the women's movement on "reducing unrealistic expectations on how women should look" ($p=.004$) or that "society has accepted the large-size woman" ($p=.0009$) and agreed significantly more that "a slim body is necessary for male approval" ($p=.00005$) and that "thinness is a symbol of beauty and success" ($p=.002$). (Manova with Wilks.)

The Perceived Effects of the Media

- The anorexics were found to be significantly more media conscious and are more influenced by the media on body images than are the other two groups. Asked to rank the top three institutions that influence their knowledge of an ideal body shape, anorexics significantly differed on the "media in general" category ($X^2=19$, $df=6$, $p=.004$), ranking it first

overall (with friends second and magazines third).

In comparison, the collegians ranked peers first, magazines second and media third. The high schoolers ranked movies first, magazines second and peers third.

Significant differences were found between the groups for ranking TV shows and movies as factions of influence. Both made stronger impact on the high schoolers. While both anorexics and collegians selected TV shows less than 5% of the time for their three-place rankings for influence, the high schoolers ranked it first, second or third 40% of the time ($X^2=14.3$, $df=6$, $p=.03$). Movies earned 46% of their second and third place ratings ($X^2=18.4$, $df=6$, $p=.005$) while the other two groups selected movies as influential only from 7% to 16% of their three-place ratings.

In other media findings, the groups were found to differ on the extent to which magazine ads promoted an ideal body shape ($p=.004$). Both anorexics and collegians scored magazines high (6.9, 6.3 on a 7-point "a great deal" scale) compared to a 5.5 average for high schoolers. Magazine ads earned the highest of all media ratings for influence but figured as the only statistically different finding between groups, which ranked the other media forms similarly, although anorexics had higher average scores across all media than the other two groups. This indicates they saw more tendency for the media to promote an ideal body shape.

Personal Eating Problems

In other findings, there were obviously significant differences in agreement about personal eating problems, with the anorexics significantly different from the other two groups in admitting to eating problems ($p=0$), being a compulsive eater ($p=.00002$), being anorexic or bulimic ($p=0$) and being "comfortable with my eating habits" ($p=.00003$), the latter with the anorexics averaging a 1.5 score (1 to 7 scale, 1 being disagree strongly),

the collegians 4.0 and the high schoolers 3.5.

Significant differences were also found for the groups' selection of "qualities in judging people." While all three groups most voted personality first, the high schoolers were more likely to select personality first ($X^2=16.7$, $df=6$, $p=.01$). They were also more likely to select intelligence as third ($X^2=19.1$, $df=8$, $p=.01$) while the other two groups split out their "intelligence" votes over the four-place rankings.

Asked for the most important criteria for physical attractiveness in women, the high schoolers again were more likely to say personality ($X^2=9.2$, $df=2$, $p=.01$) than were either other group. The anorexics and high schoolers selected body size/shape as the most important feature in women; the collegians selected face first and body size second. Surprisingly, in ranking the same criteria for men, the anorexics chose face first, then body size, while both collegians and high schoolers named body size/shape as the most important criterion for physical attractiveness.

Overall, this study does not uphold previous findings that put personality first, looks about third and intelligence fourth in judging people. This study found intelligence first, looks second and personality last. Too, previous studies have found "physically attractive people" to be considered more intelligent, interesting, poised, outgoing, healthy, exciting, and other positive adjectives. This study tended to find group averages at the mid-scale range (1 to 7 point scale) rather than positive scoring for the positive attributes. This could indicate the groups either did not attribute the adjectives to physically attractive persons or that they were undecided about the adjectives and so ascribed a middle-of-the-road rating.

Other statistically significant findings included the fact that the groups differed in their choice of ideal weight and ideal bust for the

"ideal body," their actual and current weight, their clothing size and their age. While statistically significant, none of these findings seem insightful. Differences in ideal bust size, for example, were between the collegians' 35.4" size and the anorexics 34.2" ideal bust.

A statistically significant demographic difference, income, upholds previous findings that anorexics tend to come from upper income families. In this study, 56% of the anorexics came from families with incomes over \$50,000 ($\chi^2=26.1$, $df=10$, $p=.004$).

The Photo Experiment

In general, the three groups made several similar assessments on rating models and on selecting them as representatives of certain types of people or to appear in certain types of commercials.

Rating Models on a 7-Point Success Scale

In the first part of the experiment, subjects were asked to examine photos on large posterboards and to rate each model on a 7-point scale anchored at the ends with "very successful" (1) and "not very successful" (7).

All three groups judged the same model, a heavier-set woman (No. 7, see photos in Appendix 2 at end of this paper) in what appeared to be everyday office dress, to be the least successful, although the average of 4.6 still is about mid-scale.

The collegians and the high schoolers both selected a young, modern-looking, somewhat "New Wave"-type model (head-shot only, No. 4) as the most successful; the anorexics selected a very thin, "anorexic"-type model (No. 9) as most successful.

Overall, all three groups judged the thin models as most successful, the average models next and the heavier-set models as least successful.

A Chi-square test showed statistically significant differences between the groups on the ratings of three models -- a head-shot-only, average-looking older woman; a head-and-shoulders "classic" look and a full-length anorexic look. (Older=No. 1; classic=No. 3; anorexic=No. 9)

The high school group judged the older model less successful, with more scores in the 3, 4 and 5 range, than did the other two groups, with the anorexics judging her more successful (52% of their responses were in the "2" range) than the other two groups.

Conversely, the high school students judged the overly-thin model to be less successful (40% of the answers fell in the 4 or 5 range) than did the other two groups, of which the control group of collegians, not the anorexics, gave the thin model a more successful score (52% of the collegians judged her a "1", compared to 42% of the anorexics judging her to be a "2").

Contrary to expectations, the anorexics judged the classic-look model as more successful (with more scores in the 1 and 2 range) than did the other two groups (collegians in 2 and 3 range, high schoolers in 3 and 4 range).

When individual scores for the thin, average and heavy models were averaged to create a cumulative "type" score (an anorexic score for all three "average" models, for example) the control group and anorexics had similar averages for the heavier models, a mid-scale score of 4.1, with the high schoolers judging them more successful. (See Table 1) The high schoolers judged the thin models as less successful than the other two groups, with the anorexics providing the most successful score.

Table 1. Comparison of Three Groups' Scores on "Types" of Models in Photo Experiment

	Anorexics	Collegians	High Schoolers
Average of heavy models (No. 7, 13, 15)	2.9	2.9	3.2
Average of "average" models (No. 8, 10, 11)	3.9	3.8	3.5
Average of thin models (No. 9, 12, 14)	4.8	4.5	3.6

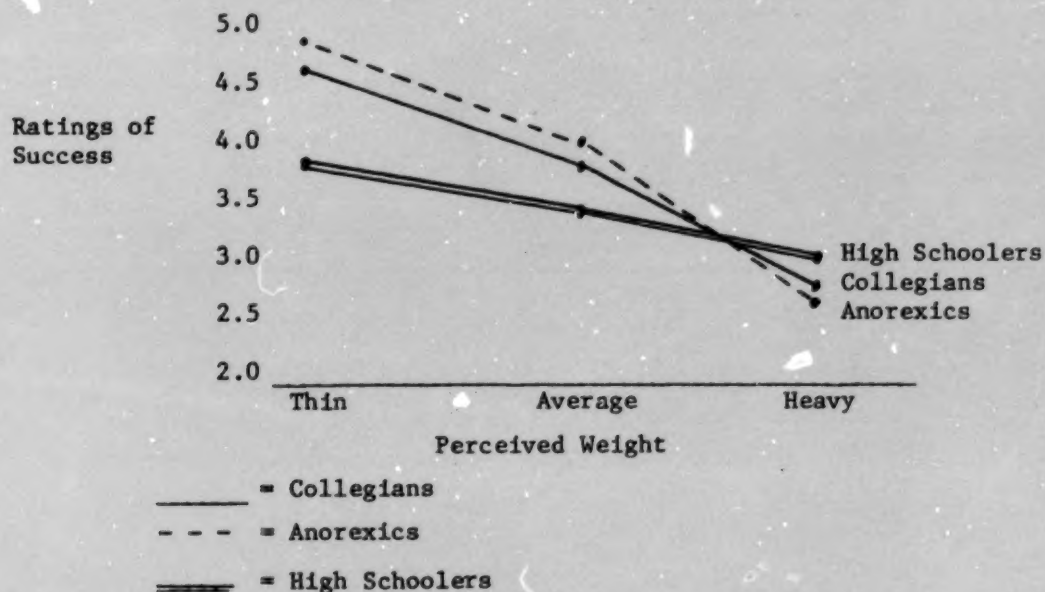
1 = "not very successful" 7 = "very successful"

Group averages obtained by adding together the overall average scores for each model (Model 7, Model 13 and Model 15, for example) by group (anorexic averages, for example), and dividing by 3 to obtain a "type" average for comparative purposes.

The high schoolers also judged the average models to be less successful than did the other two groups, which rated them similarly.

Main results are that all groups indicated that success was directly related to thinness and that this relationship was most pronounced among the anorexics.

Table 1a. Graph Interpretation of Mean Scores of Model "Types"



Selecting Models for Occupations

In this section, subjects were asked to select the model who would be a good representative of the listed occupation.

Overall, the subjects tended to select models for occupations according to current media stereotypes or usages of such people -- older people for established occupations, heavier people for mid-level occupations or "non-threatening" or "service"-type jobs. Few thin persons were selected for roles or occupations and no average models were selected. Surprisingly, the thinner models were not among those selected to represent a "successful person." Differences between groups were more between the collegians and the high schoolers than with the anorexics, who tended to fall into the regular patterns of the other groups' selections. (See photo chart for selected occupations.)

In overall votes, the older women were selected to be bank officer, next door neighbor, social worker and successful person. The classic-look model was selected to be the computer programmer and friend. The modern, New Wave model was selected to be the model, with an overly-thin model running a close second. Surprisingly, the young, fresh-faced model (No. 5) was selected to be the nurse, closely followed by two of the full-length, heavier models. A heavy model was selected to be the secondary teacher. For successful person, the votes were 15 for the first older woman (also the bank officer and runner-up to social worker), 9 for the modern, New Wave model who was selected as model, 8 for the second older woman (also selected to be social worker and next door neighbor) and, surprisingly, 9 for one of the heavier models who appeared in sequined dressy evening wear.

The most surprising finding was the votes for "next door neighbor," which were fairly evenly distributed among four types: the young, fresh-faced model, the two heavy models in average clothes and the silver-haired, older woman.

Table 2. Types of Models
Chosen for Occupations

Bank officer: older woman (No. 1)
 Computer programmer: classic beauty (No. 3)
 Fashion model: modern, New Wave type (closely followed by thin)
 Friend: classic beauty
 Next door neighbor: young, fresh-faced; heavy; heavy; older
 Nurse: young, fresh-faced; heavy; heavy
 Secondary teacher: heavy
 Social Worker: older; older
 Successful person: older; modern, New Wave; heavy; older

Selecting Models for Commercials

As shown in the photo chart, fairly stereotypical selections were made for the advertising spots except for the kitchen cleanser, for which most of

votes (23 of 78) were cast for the young, fresh-faced model, most of those by the collegians.

In other votes, the classic-look model was selected for the computer commercial (she was also selected to be computer programmer in the occupation section). As mentioned, the fresh-faced, young model was chosen to demonstrate kitchen cleansers, followed by the two heavy models. The silver-haired older and then a heavier model were chosen for the coffee commercial, presumably because "older" people drink coffee, the heavier one presumably because she was shown holding a teacup.

The New Wave model selected for the model occupation was chosen for the jeans commercial, followed by all three of the thin models.

The older women were chosen equally for the aspirin commercial (23 votes each) and a traditionally thin person was chosen for the new car commercial. These selections seem representative of the types of people currently being used in commercials.

Again, few real differences surfaced in selections between groups, but of the differences, most were noted between the collegians' choices and those of the high schoolers; for example, 3 of the high schoolers selecting the older model (NO. 1) for the computer commercial, with 12 of the collegians selecting her.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Nothing especially startling emerges from this research. No never-before-ascertained sentiments or statistics. No "proof" of devious media collusion in attempting to carve out a thin American woman.

What was achieved in this pilot study was threefold:

- (1) The results suggest that this type of study -- an anonymous

questionnaire and photo-oriented experiment -- can be administered with a decent amount of control and can be interpreted with a fair amount of confidence (18), and, along these same lines of concern, that anorexics, even though in psychological counseling, can provide good insight into their own behavior (18). The experiment could be strengthened with a great deal more control over the size, shape and content of the photos; this pilot research indicates that the time and cost involved in this change could be well spent.

(2) The results unfortunately give additional credence to the theory that there does exist an "ideal body shape" to which women are, in differing degrees, enslaved, either in daily action (anorexics and the general widespread tendency to diet) or in thought (the negative self-assessment and attitudes). This confirms the feminists' writings and points to a new area for the liberationists to conquer.

(3) The results provide the first known linkage between the media and young women's theory of an "ideal body shape" and furthermore suggest that the anorexic are strongly influenced by media images. If we take as a given that the media tend to portray women as unnaturally thin (never mind the continually young, perfect-pore, Grecian features phenomena) and if we also accept the advertising industry's own count that most persons are exposed daily to from 400 to 1500 ad messages, and if we accept that many if not most of those messages will be aimed at women or will use women as visuals, then we can take as a given that the media in general and advertising in specific can be and indeed are powerful purveyors of a socially-created "norm" for women.

That anorexic young women are much less happy with their bodies than are their peers could have been, and was, assumed at the outset. That women in general are almost painfully aware of an "ideal body shape"

and that such a thing affects their lives and attitudes cannot only be assumed, but is documented in this small study.

That "average/normal" women are virtually invisible was not expected but was suggested in the experiment where no "average" women were selected for either occupations or commercials. This is perhaps the one surprising and rather upsetting finding for it says that to be noticed, women must either be "right" (thin) or "wrong." And, if they are wrong, they are put into non-intimidating, helper, service-type categories and roles. To be average, to the groups in this study, was to be invisible. Perhaps this speaks to a broader societal tendency to notice the extremes but not the middle, or, that being the middle is being nowhere.

That body size and its sidekicks of acceptable image and acceptable eating do indeed provide a special perspective on women is also affirmed by this project.

And so, what do we conclude? That the media are villainous? Or that they are mirroring our desires? That they are only attempting to accrue mass audiences for programs or mass sales for goods? That women are the (thin) butt of some type of conspiracy?

Not really.

What we can conclude is that we have on our (manicured, polished) hands a definite problem, empirically ascertained. What we can do is continue to research the impact of the ever-present media upon women's images of themselves, and, most importantly, through this type of research, we can make women aware of the problem of body imagery itself and of the impact of the media's imagery.

This particular experiment and others like it should continue to be conducted to obtain greater N's from which to base assumptions and action

plans.

Similar studies should be conducted with women in other age categories (30's, 40's, 50's, etc.) to see if the sentiment is universal across American ages and that they, too, harbor negative attitudes about themselves or associate their sentiments to some type of national decree for an ideal body shape. Too, we should determine if men and women place similar conditions on this body shape, with similar determinants, or, are women being unduly harsh or overly sensitive in their expectations for themselves?

Research of this nature -- and the potential for awakening that it might assist -- is a positive first step to unshackling women from unnecessary and unreal expectations. It is also the ammunition with which the advertising, TV and movie industries can be approached with admonitions, and indeed arguments, for change.

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable assistance of Dr. Margaret Intons-Peterson, Department of Psychology; Nancy Stockton, Ph.D. and Ron Thompson, Ph.D., counselors at the Counseling and Psychological Services, Student Health Service, all at Indiana University.

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1. Various feminist writers speak too eloquently about the problem of women and eating to go unnoted. Among the many spine-tingling quotes are the following, which gave breadth to the questionnaire and the problem:
Bruch: "...included to relate it to the enormous emphasis that fashion places on slimness. . .magazines and movies. . .but the most persistent is television, drumming it in, day in and day out, that one can be loved and respected only when one is slender."

Orbach: "Women are especially susceptible to these demands to lose weight because they are brought up to conform to an image of womanhood that places importance on body size and shape. We are taught that we must both blend in and stand out -- a contradictory message indeed."

Orbach, 173: "If this is a psychological state that affects women, shouldn't the treatment include recognition of social factors that lead women to compulsive eating and self starvation? Food carries symbolic meanings that reflect the problems women face in dealing with an oppressive social role."

Chernin: (Before doing her book) "I would have to ask why our culture held up before us an ideal image that was appropriate only to an adolescent. I needed to understand whether this inappropriate ideal was part of a much larger coercion exercised against the full and natural development of women."

(The thing that triggered her finally starting the book): A woman said to her, 'I have rarely had a moment of peace about my body. All my life, no matter what else is going on, I have felt an uneasiness. A sense that something was about to get out of control. That I needed to keep watch. That something about me needed changing.'

Chernin: "It is tragic. . .existing from the neck up, we live out our lives feeling alien within it, disembodied."

"Anorexia nervosa now suggests that our tempestuous warfare against our bodies involves no less than a woman's identity as a woman."

"The behaviors we direct toward the social world may well express our radical orientation towards a woman's self-development. But the behaviors we direct towards our own body express our implicit loyalty to the conventional world."

17. It should be noted here that approximately 62 women's magazines were perused in an attempt to find three "average" photos of women sized 12 to 14. Even catalogs aimed at larger-sized women and featuring large, half-sized clothing used thin models, as determined by face and arm size. (The clothing was merely billowed out around them, and, at that, the smallest of the large size clothing was pictured.) The large size photos were obtained only because of the publication of a magazine (BBW, Big Beautiful Woman) specifically for this audience. One of the "average" photos was finally found in a Sears catalog, but several catalogs and magazines were examined in an effort to find some.
18. It seems appropriate to note that several persons, aware of the development of the project, questioned whether subjects would truly give objective answers or would answer with socially-acceptable answers that

might be less than revealing (for example, would young women truly say they disliked their body images or feel too embarrassed to admit it?). The chair of a noted university advertising department in a school of journalism also admonished the researcher to take care in continuing the study, since one couldn't trust the answers of anorexics, who, he said, were severely disturbed individuals. He added that media researchers at that institution had had similar research ideas but had dropped them because of the expected "oddness" of the anorexics' replies.

Many conversations with Counselors Stockton and Thompson, IU counseling center, indicated that their extensive experience with in-counseling anorexics indicated that such young women had a high interest in their problem and a willingness to explore its origins and consequences. Insights provided by the pair were invaluable in considering the tabulated responses and interpreting the results as well as understanding the general scope of the illness, particularly its multifaceted and family-oriented roots.

Indiana University

Survey on Attractiveness and Body Shapes

Your candid and honest answers on this anonymous survey will be greatly appreciated in helping researchers determine personal attitudes toward physical attractiveness and body shapes.

1. How important are the following qualities to you in determining how you judge people around you? Please rank from most important to least important. 1 = most important

_____ character
 _____ intelligence
 _____ looks
 _____ personality

2. In your personal opinion, physical attractiveness in women is most determined by: (choose only one)

_____ body size/shape
 _____ clothes
 _____ face
 _____ hairstyle
 _____ personality

3. Physical attractiveness in men is most determined by: (choose only one)

_____ body size/shape
 _____ clothes
 _____ face
 _____ hairstyle
 _____ personality

4. Physically-attractive women are more likely to be: (Circle the number on the scale that best indicates the intensity of your feeling about the word choice.)

Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
Sexually cold	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sexually warm
Insensitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sensitive
Interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Boring
Poised	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Awkward
Immodest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Modest
Outgoing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Introverted
Healthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unhealthy
Poor Sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Good sport
Exciting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dull
Successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unsuccessful

5. There is an image of an "ideal body shape" in American society to which women are expected to conform.

_____ Agree

_____ Disagree

(If you disagree, please answer the rest of the questions as if there was an ideal body shape.)

6. This "ideal body image" is based on the following attributes: (Circle the scale number that indicates the intensity of your agreement.)

Thin	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Heavy
Older	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Younger
Pubescent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mature
Womanlike	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Childlike
Fragile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strong
Brunette	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Blonde
Unisex	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Feminine
Curvey	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Boyish

7. My body conforms to this ideal.

Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Disagree

8. I am content with my body shape.

Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Disagree

9. I am content with my physical attractiveness.

Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Disagree

10. I believe that most women feel there is an "ideal body shape."

Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Disagree

11. I believe most women's lives are influenced by this "ideal body shape."

Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Disagree

12. I am influenced by this "ideal body shape."

Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Disagree

13. To me, the ideal body shape for women would include the following elements: (please write in your answers)

Height:

Weight:

Bone structure:

Measurements:

 _____ (S, M, L)
 _____ / _____ / _____
 Bust Waist Hips

Hair color:

Eye color:

Clothing size;

 _____ (Please use numeral,
 not S,M,L)

14. Which of the following has contributed most to your knowledge of an "ideal body shape." Please rank the top three in order.

_____ family
 _____ peers/friends/colleagues
 _____ media in general
 _____ advertising
 _____ school
 _____ church or religious training
 _____ fashion designers
 _____ TV shows
 _____ movies
 _____ magazines

15. How much do you think the media listed below promote an image of an "ideal body shape?"

	<u>Very little</u>				<u>A great deal</u>		
Newspapers (including photos but not ads)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Newspaper advertising	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Magazines (including photos but not ads)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Magazine advertising	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TV programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TV commercials	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Movies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Books	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
MTV and music videos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16. Please circle the scale number that indicates the intensity of your agreement with the following statements:

	<u>Disagree strongly</u>				<u>Agree strongly</u>		
The women's movement has reduced unrealistic expectations on how women should look.	V				V		
Women lose weight more for self-satisfaction than to please others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being able to control body size is an important sign of personal power.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Dieting is part of being a woman.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Self-fulfillment is more important to most women than appearance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Most women really want to be thin.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Nowadays many women feel no more pressure to be slim than men do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	<u>Disagree</u> <u>Strongly</u>					<u>Agree</u> <u>Strongly</u>	
I have never really felt comfortable about my body shape.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fashion advertising is a good source of information on how women's bodies should look.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Society has finally accepted the large-size woman.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There is definitely an American image on how an attractive woman should look.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A slim body is necessary for male approval.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Models shown in advertisements are unrealistic--few people really look that way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Today's woman need not conform to a cultural mandate for sleekness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Thinness is a symbol of beauty and success.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU. . .

	<u>Disagree</u> <u>Strongly</u>					<u>Agree</u> <u>Strongly</u>	
I have an eating problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am overweight.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am a compulsive eater.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am anorexic or bulimic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am comfortable with food intake.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am comfortable with my eating habits.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I eat for the wrong reasons.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Have you been on a diet in the past month? ☐ yes ☐ no

Please indicate: Your height: _____
 Your weight: _____
 Your clothing size: _____

Age: _____
 Current year of school: _____

Family income:

☐ Below \$10,000/year
☐ \$10,000-15,000
☐ \$16,000-25,000

☐ \$26,000-35,000
☐ \$36,000-50,000
☐ More than \$50,000

This final section centers on visual images. Please look at the photos mounted on the large posterboards in order to answer the following questions.

NOTE: You may select a photo more than once.

You may decide none of the photos are appropriate. If so, write "none" on the answer line.

1. Rate each model on the following scale according to how successful they appear to be to you.

	<u>Very successful</u>				<u>Not very successful</u>		
Model 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 13	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 14	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Model 15	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Select one model who you think would be a good representative of the following types of people. Write in the model's number next to the description:

Bank officer _____
 Computer programmer _____
 Fashion model _____
 Friend _____
 Next-door neighbor _____
 Nurse _____
 Secondary schoolteacher _____
 Social worker _____
 Successful person _____

3. Select one model who you think would be a good representative to appear in the following types of advertising:

A commercial for home computers _____
 A commercial for a new type of kitchen cleanser _____
 A coffee commercial _____
 A magazine ad for jeans _____
 A commercial featuring a person discussing aspirin _____
 A magazine ad for a new car _____

Thank you very much for your time and effort!



OLDER, SILVER-HAIRED

MODEL 6

- Next-door neighbor
- Social worker
- Successful person
- Coffee commercial
- Aspirin commercial



OLDER

MODEL 1

- One of 3 significantly different models, (h.s. less successful, anor. more succ)
- Bank officer
- Social worker
- Successful person
- Aspirin commercial

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



MODEL 2

HEAVY



MODERN, "NEW WAVE"

MODEL 4

- Selected most successful model by collegians and high schoolers
- Fashion model (occupation)
- Successful person
- Jeans commercial (No. 1 choice)



"CLASSIC" BEAUTY

MODEL 3

- Computer programmer (occupation)
- Friend (occupation)
- Computer commercial

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



YOUNG, FRESH-FACED

MODEL 5

- Next-door neighbor
- Nurse (#1 choice)
- Kitchen cleanser ad

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



HEAVY

MODEL 7

- Chosen "least successful" model by all 3 groups
- Nurse (runner-up)
- Secondary teacher
- Kitchen cleanser ad (runner-up)
- Next door neighbor

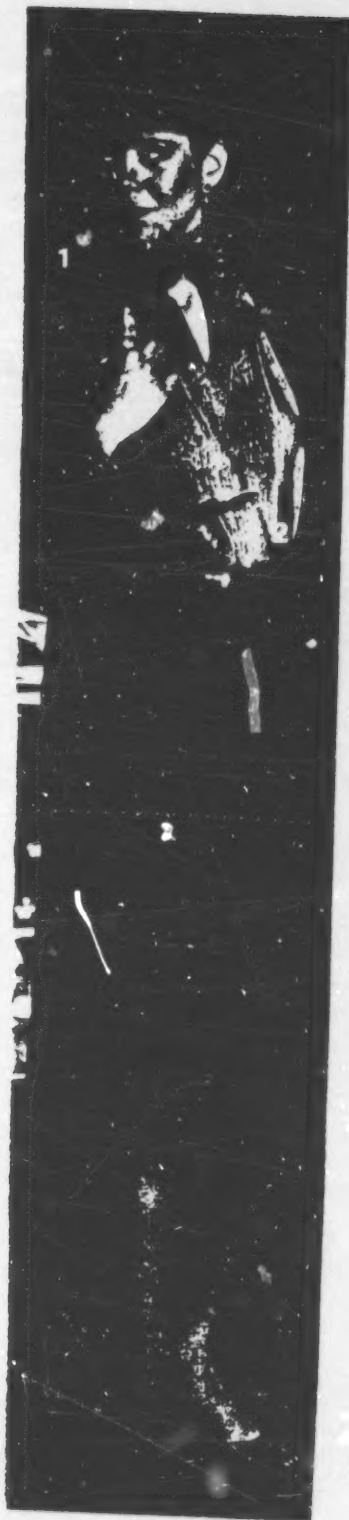
MODEL 13

HEAVY

- Successful person (runner-up)



BEST COPY AVAILABLE



MODEL 10
AVERAGE

• Runner-up, computer programmer



AVERAGE
MODEL 8

Aside from No. 10's runner-up status for computer programmer (14 votes to the first choice's 29), these "average" models were selected for neither ads nor occupations.



MODEL 11
AVERAGE



MODEL 14

THIN, ANOREXIC

- Jeans ad (runner-up)

<---MODEL 12

THIN, ANOREXIC

- New Car commercial
- Jeans ad (runner-up)



THIN, ANOREXIC

MODEL 9

- Most successful model for anorexic group
- Fashion model (runner-up)
- Jeans ad (runner-up)

APPENDIX 3. Manova Results

Variable	Description	Means			Wilks	Significance
		Anor.	Colleg.	H.S.		
V29	Thin	6.7	6.5	5.5	.44	.00005
V31	Pubescent	3.2	2.2	2.2	at	.0189
V33	Fragile	3.3	4.1	4.7	.00001	.0086
V35	Unisex	2.7	1.7	2.1		.058
V36	Boyish	3.6	1.9	1.7		.00008
V37	My body conforms to this ideal (body shape).	2.2	3.9	3.3	.63	.005
V39	I am content with my physical attractiveness.	2.8	4.4	3.5	at	.006
V42	I'm influenced by this "ideal body shape."	6.4	5.3	4.7	.00164	.002
V65	Magazine ads	6.8	6.3	5.4	.577	.0003
					at	
					.004	
V73	Women's movement reduced unrealistic expectations about how women should look.	2.6	3.3	4.1	.37	.0049
V80	I have never really felt comfortable about my body shape.	4.9	3.3	4.6	.0003	.009
V82	Society has finally accepted large-size women.	1.7	3.0	3.5		.0009
V84	Slim body is necessary for male approval.	5.6	3.7	3.4		.00005
V87	Thinness is a symbol of beauty and success.	5.0	3.3	3.2		.002
V88	I have an eating problem.	6.7	3.3	3.6	.175	0
V90	I am a compulsive eater.	5.5	2.7	3.2	at	.00002
V91	I am anorexic or bulimic.	5.9	1.0	2.0	0	0
V93	I am comfortable with my eating habits.	1.5	4.0	3.5		.00003

NOTE: Scale is 1= disagree strongly, 7=agree strongly